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研究ノート(Notes)

Application of Bilingualism to English as a Foreign Language Education in Japan

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Ⅰ. Introduction

Although thousands of ethnic groups and languages exist worldwide, only 200 nation-states are recognized politically. This discrepancy shows that many people share languages across cultures or national boundaries. Being Japanese, my past perception of bilingualism was that bilingualism was just a special issue for special people. In this context, my main curiosity was how we could teach students from regular Japanese families to develop bilingual abilities inside Japan. However, after reflection upon the readings on bilingualism, my interest in concrete methodologies on bringing up bilingual children has changed to an interest in the philosophical applications of bilingualism in Japan's English as a Foreign Language (EFL) settings.

This paper considers the possibilities of applying the concept of bilingualism to EFL education in my working environment. With this aim, I will begin by discussing bilingualism as an individual phenomenon. Section Ⅲ will introduce bilingual education in societal contexts. In the final section, suggestions will be made on the direction that we as EFL teachers should take in the 21st century.

Ⅱ. Bilingualism as an Individual Phenomenon

(1) 'Traditional' Image of Bilinguals in Japan and Social/Cultural Views on Bilingualism

The image of bilinguals that I once held, and perhaps the majority of Japanese people still hold, comes from Chomskyans' view of bilingualism wherein the two languages have separate physical channels in the brain. According to Hakuta (1986), for Chomsky, language is autonomous from the rest of cognition and the structures of human development are part of the genetic endowment of humans, requiring little more than minimal stimulation from the environment to mature, therefore, bilinguals do not require special treatment.

In this context, the environment for people such as returnees, language minorities, and students from bilingual homes is naturally bilingual, and neither efforts nor devices to create a bilingual environment are necessary. The neurological level debates, such as Penfield and Roberts' (1959) discovery of the left hemisphere of the brain as the language development region, support the concept of a bilingual from biological perspectives. Following this concept, the Japanese admire bilinguals greatly, especially those who have mastered both Japanese and a European language.

In the case of language minorities, however, Japan is not an exception to Berry's (1990) acculturation strategies where assimilation into the dominant culture takes place by giving up features of the original culture. According to Giles and Johnson's (1987) ethnolinguistic identity theory, the features of the minority language group are completely sacrificed in favor of those of the majority language group. Liebkind (1999: 143) explains as follows:

> If, however, one's own language is a source of shame only, contributing primarily to a negative social identity, other strategies may be adopted. Some group members may use assimilation strategies and try to pass into and become members of the dominant group.

However, in the case of returnees and students from bilingual homes, simultaneous integration of the two language groups becomes possible because of the high socio-economic status of European languages. Fishman (1999: 405) explains the socio-historical status of Western languages in Japan stating that "they [= Western languages --- K.M.] became the yardstick of what was useful, modern, and good."

If bilingual ability were given only to privileged people, and was never given to ordinary Japanese, society would respect a bilingual as an especially talented person with a high socio-economic status. For example, the Japanese word *"bailin-gal,"* which means a bilingual girl(gal), positively connotes an international-minded person with natural linguistic abilities.

However, bilingualism in social/cultural contexts would drastically change the traditional Japanese view towards bilingualism to a broader one. Davis (1994) states:

> Individual language choice, use and abilities depend on the various functions languages serve for the individual within their group and societal network. These functions include: topics and settings (administrative, professional, social, and private); channels (reading, writing, speaking, and listening);

and between- group or within-group interaction (socioeconomic status, region, age, sex, and nationality).

Under this definition, people like myself would be considered bilingual not in biological terms, but in a social and cultural context. In other words, L2 learners could become bilingual, even though they start learning the language after the so-called critical period-- the period of time in child development when language is thought to be most easily learned (cf. Lenneberg (1967)).

(2) Bilingualism and Biculturalism

Culture affects people and people affect culture. Moreover, culture changes over time. In this section, I will consider bilingualism in terms of biculturalism, analyzing bilinguals around me. For the taxonomy of the degree of bilingualism, I will adopt the terminology of Peal and Lambert (1962) as summarized in Hakuta (1986: 34):

> They [= Peal and Lambert --- K.M.] drew a distinction between true "balanced bilinguals," who are proficient in both their first (L1) and second (L2) languages, and "pseudo-bilinguals," who for various reasons have not attained age-appropriate abilities in their second language.

Balanced bilinguals with biculturalism

A Japanese returnee student spent 14 years in New York and Los Angeles on his father's business; he attended

high school and university in Japan. His TOEFL score was perfect, and he finished his education in Japan with fairly good grades. His identity as an international-minded individual is accepted both in Japan and the United States.

As Nakajima (1998) comments, because the student spent his years abroad in urban areas where ethnographical, linguistical and cultural diversities exist, he became an 'additive bilingual' retaining his Japanese identity as well as his mother tongue. Nakajima specifies that the additive bilinguals have positive attitudes as a cultural informant to both cultures while retaining the identity of their mother culture.

Balanced bilinguals without biculturalism

A woman comes from a regular Japanese family that raised their child to develop bilingual abilities inside Japan. The woman's father, who had acquired a second language only through enormous efforts and hardships, urged her to study at an international school in Japan for her elementary and secondary education. Later she spent her tertiary education in a Japanese university.

Although she perceives herself as a perfect bilingual person, her cultural identity is solidly Japanese. She says that she would never marry a foreigner, but only a Japanese man. She has recognized both the benefits of being bilingual in Japan with the high socio-economic status, but also the inconvenience of being involved in an inter-cultural marriage. As Liebkind (1999) exemplifies Berry's (1990) acculturation strategies, the woman uses different strategies

in different areas of life --- seeking her economic assimilation by working at a foreign-capital company, linguistic integration by speaking two languages, but marital separation through endogamy. Liebkind (op. cit.: 141) also states:

> There are two polar positions to explain ethnic phenomena. One of these emphasizes the changeable aspects of ethnicity. According to this view, people are seen as acknowledging their ethnic identity only when they consider it to be useful for themselves. For example, if it is easier to get a job or an apartment by changing ethnic characteristics, people will do it, if possible. In other words, a language which hinders an individual's personal security and well-being will more easily be given up. In this perspective, modern man is (often exaggeratedly) viewed as "a shrewd calculator of membership benefits." (Fishman 1989: 37)

Pseudo-bilinguals with biculturalism

The example here is my own case. I spent most of my education from kindergarten through university in Japan and began graduate school in the United States at the age of 21. My stay abroad lasted for 4 years, including a period of working in the United States after graduation. I perceive myself as a pseudo or semi-bilingual, with weaker linguistic abilities of L2 (English) attained mostly through the second language education.

However, I identify myself as a fairly bicultural or even a "subtractive bicultural" person. Despite Minoura's

(1984) study that suggests the critical period of biculturalism is from ages 9 to 11, I assimilated deeply into American culture during the short period of my stay. Because of my successful assimilation, I suffered a tremendous identity crisis upon returning to Japan. My cultural identity was almost doomed to be 'decultural': I feared loneliness, as I was not precisely understood by my fellow Japanese.

Surely, there is a correlation between bilingualism and biculturalism. Nevertheless, once identity issues are involved, we may differentiate bilingualism and biculturalism as separate concepts, since it is possible to identify with another ethnic group even if the language is not perfectly attained. Liebkind (1999: 141) states:

> Within the social psychology of identity, a person's self-image is seen to have two components, personal identity and social identity. The latter derives from membership in various groups. Ethnic identity, in turn, is that part of an individual's self-concept which derives from his or her membership in social groups. We try to achieve a positive sense of social identity by trying to perceive our own group as favorably distinct from other collectivities on valued dimensions. This is called the need for positive distinctiveness (Tajfel 1978).

Liebkind (ibid.: 147) further explains:

> In bilingual contexts, languages (codes) often serve as powerful cues for categorizing people into social/ethnolinguistic groups. This categorization often

triggers efforts to achieve positive distinctiveness, as discussed previously.

In my case, as I tried so hard to acquire native-like proficiency in a second language (English) and the economic satisfaction of having a job in the United States, I adopted this alien cultural perspective as my own identity. As Liebkind (ibid.: 148) analyzes, "an integrative attitude toward the second language means that this language has a symbolic value and implies identification with speakers of that language."

Pseudo-bilinguals without biculturalism

The next example is the case of my husband, who spent most of his education in Japan and his five years of graduate study in the United States. Though he speaks English fluently, he sees himself as nearly monocultural with Japanese values, ways of thinking and behavior. As Nakajima (1998) explains, this may be partially due to the fact that he went abroad at the adult age of 25. Specifically, my husband perceives American culture as a foreign culture and accepts it at the cognitive level, not at the emotional nor behavioral levels.

His case exemplifies the description of Liebkind (op.cit.: 148), "If the attitude is a purely instrumental one, the second language is viewed only as a tool for communication and does not affect identity." My husband did not experience an identity crisis nor reverse-culture shock as I did.

Thus, the degree of cultural acquisition differs depending on the individual. Some understand the culture but do not act as the culture requires. Others understand and act, but do not accept the foreign culture emotionally. Still others, like me, become emotionally connected with the foreign culture, and adopt the foreign culture as a part of their own identity.

Truly, bilingualism is extremely complex. Hakuta (1986: 104) concludes "The mind is a complex thing, and we have restricted it to an account of knowledge, omitting other domains such as emotions and feelings."

Ⅲ Bilingual Education in Societal Contexts

Bilingual education has specific functions and implications which differ from society to society. Attitudes toward language and its education systems often reflect the societal and political needs and expectations.

Since the UNESCO's statement in 1951 that every child has the right to begin his/her formal education in his/her mother tongue, the U.S. has recognized bilingual education for the purpose of maintaining ethnic or religious ties. However, the history of bilingualism in the U.S. goes back to the 1880s where its aim was to assimilate such individuals as immigrants and indigenous people into mainstream American society.

Language can mediate between social or political groups as well. A relevant example is the French-English immersion project in St. Lambert, Quebec, where parents of English-speaking children volunteered to enroll their

children in French-medium schools. Their successful results have led to the political reconciliation and the development of bilingual education in Canada.

Ferguson (1977) defines the goals of bilingual education as follows:

- To assimilate individuals or groups into the mainstream of society
- To unify a multilingual society
- To enable people to communicate with the outside world
- To gain an economic advantage for individuals or groups
- To preserve ethnic or religious ties
- To reconcile different political, or socially separate, communities
- To spread and maintain the use of a colonial language
- To embellish or strengthen the education of elites
- To give equal status to languages of unequal prominence in the society
- To deepen understanding of language and culture

Ferguson categorizes the cases of Thailand and Japan into the above-mentioned goal of gaining an economic advantage for individuals or groups. He perceives that the foreign language skill provides high socio-economic status within the countries.

In Japan, various forms of EFL education or bilingual education in a broader sense are seen not only in public schools but in commercial language schools as well. Actually, there are a few bilingual schools such as Kato Gakuen in Shizuoka, which utilizes the concepts of French

immersion programs within their whole education systems.

In recent years, Japan has also acknowledged the necessity of deepening understanding of language and culture through EFL education. However, being the extreme and intensive application of EFL education, bilingual education brings many conflicts and problems to be solved in terms of preserving the first language and cultural, political and ethnic identity. How should we cope with these issues? Some suggestions will be presented in the following section.

Ⅳ. Discussion / Conclusion

The choice of becoming a bilingual or not is up to individuals and societies. Hakuta (1986) comments that choosing whether the child is to be raised bilingually or not is like choosing a brand of diaper; parents have the choice of the expensive, elite brand of diaper or the reasonably priced one. Very true. As a parent, I will choose the "international-brand" diaper for my own child. However, what should be done in terms of one EFL teacher in Japan?

Realistically speaking, establishing bilingual education at the societal level or even facilitating institutional bilingual programs in Japan will require much time and consideration. Though there is a growing awareness of internationalization in present-day Japan due to Japan's economic growth and the increased foreign labor force, our society recognizes the advantages of bilingualism, but does not yet encourage people to become bilingual or bicultural. As Coulmas (1999: 408) cites, "says renowned

contemporary linguist Suzuki Takao, "That Japan's only hope of surviving as an economic superpower lies in maintaining its own values, cultural autonomy, and language in the international community" (1987: 134).

Japanese society needs people who can speak English fluently as a means of communication in international business situations, who accept society's rules without questions or trouble-making, and who hold a definite Japanese identity. However, in my observation, the more globalization proceeds, the more ethnocentric people become. Liebkind (1999: 150) predicts that "Although international, political and economic interdependence is clearly present and visible everywhere, many societies are shaken by internal claims for increased decentralization or even internal splits into smaller independent units."

How should we cope with this tendency? I suggest we perceive the concepts of bilingualism and biculturalism in a broader sense and apply them to intercultural communication/education. Because of the contradictory tendency of economic globalization and cultural decentralization stated above, promoting intercultural understanding in EFL education will be highly appreciated for students' cognitive development.

Japanese identity is virtually determined by the Japanese language since only less than 2% of the Japanese population is a linguistic minority. In such a homogenous society, pure bilingualism or multilingualism is hardly realized. Rather, we must create an awareness of cultural diversity and an intercultural consciousness by teaching intercultural education. Introducing intercultural education

on the cognitive level is only a beginning, but is urgently needed for Japan in the next century.

For linguistic development, we should adopt Jim Cummin's (1980) theory to content-based instruction in EFL settings. Jim Cummins has brought the notion of cross-lingual dimension, or "common underlying capacity" to connect L1 and L2 language proficiency. In other words, the skills and knowledge which are acquired in L1 could benefit the second language acquisition through the cognitive transfer. If this theory is true, the effectiveness of content-based EFL instruction in second language acquisition will be implied. Students learn English through contents that are attained in Japanese. At the same time, they learn contents through English. Here, contents play a role of so-called common underlying capacity.

In conclusion, to implement bilingualism / biculturalism into the Japanese classroom, we must start by focusing on intercultural education. Along with teaching language skills, intercultural education should be taught through a content-based approach. Developing the student's cognitive knowledge of other cultures in the global society is the first step to applying bilingualism in the EFL setting.

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